

Connect360: The Just for the Unjust

November 7, 2022

- *Lesson 9 in the Connect 360 unit “Hunger for Holiness: Living Pure in an Impure World” focuses on 1 Peter 3:18-22.*

Like so many before us, our attention is drawn to a few odd statements made by Peter in this text. First, however, we must clearly understand that Peter’s purpose was to remind those who are suffering that Christ also suffered.

If you have ever suffered in life, you are in good company. Everyone suffers at some point of their life. But for the believer, there is no need to fear suffering. The path to glory, or God’s righteousness, is marked with suffering. There are, of course, different degrees of suffering some will face, but Peter reminded his readers that Jesus suffered unto death. Yet God, by the Holy Spirit, brought Jesus to life giving him victory over death.

Jesus painfully suffered and died. His suffering was intense beyond anything we could imagine. The pain Jesus experienced should be ever in front of the believer.

Righteousness has a cost; a cost we cannot afford but was paid for us. The uniqueness of Jesus’ death is that it was “once for all” (3:18a). We see in Christ’s suffering and death, God’s deliverance of the unrighteous. Jesus lived a perfect life, free from sin, and was righteous before the Father (2:21-22). Yet Jesus suffered and died so all imperfect, tarnished humanity would have the opportunity to draw close to God.

This great chasm that separates God and humanity, the righteous and the

unrighteous, has been bridged by Christ's suffering and death. But God did not stop there. In the midst of suffering, the Spirit of God acted, bringing life out of death. Though the cross may have bridged the chasm between God and humanity, it is by the power of the resurrection we are able to walk across.

It is by this same power in the Holy Spirit that Jesus went and preached to the spirits in prison (3:19-20a). This odd statement has created centuries of debate. Where did Jesus go to preach and who or what are the spirits in prison?

St. Augustine supposed Jesus went all the way back to preach through Noah to those caught in sin about to die under the floodwaters, especially the "Nephilim" (Genesis 6:4). Others held that Jesus went back to preach freedom to the faithful who died long before he came to earth or to the sinners who did not get the chance to believe. The most popular theory reasons that through his death and resurrection, Jesus proclaimed judgment over evil spirits and powers. Supporters of this theory note Peter made a similar statement in his second letter (2 Peter 2:4).

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